

I Care Because You Do

Introduction

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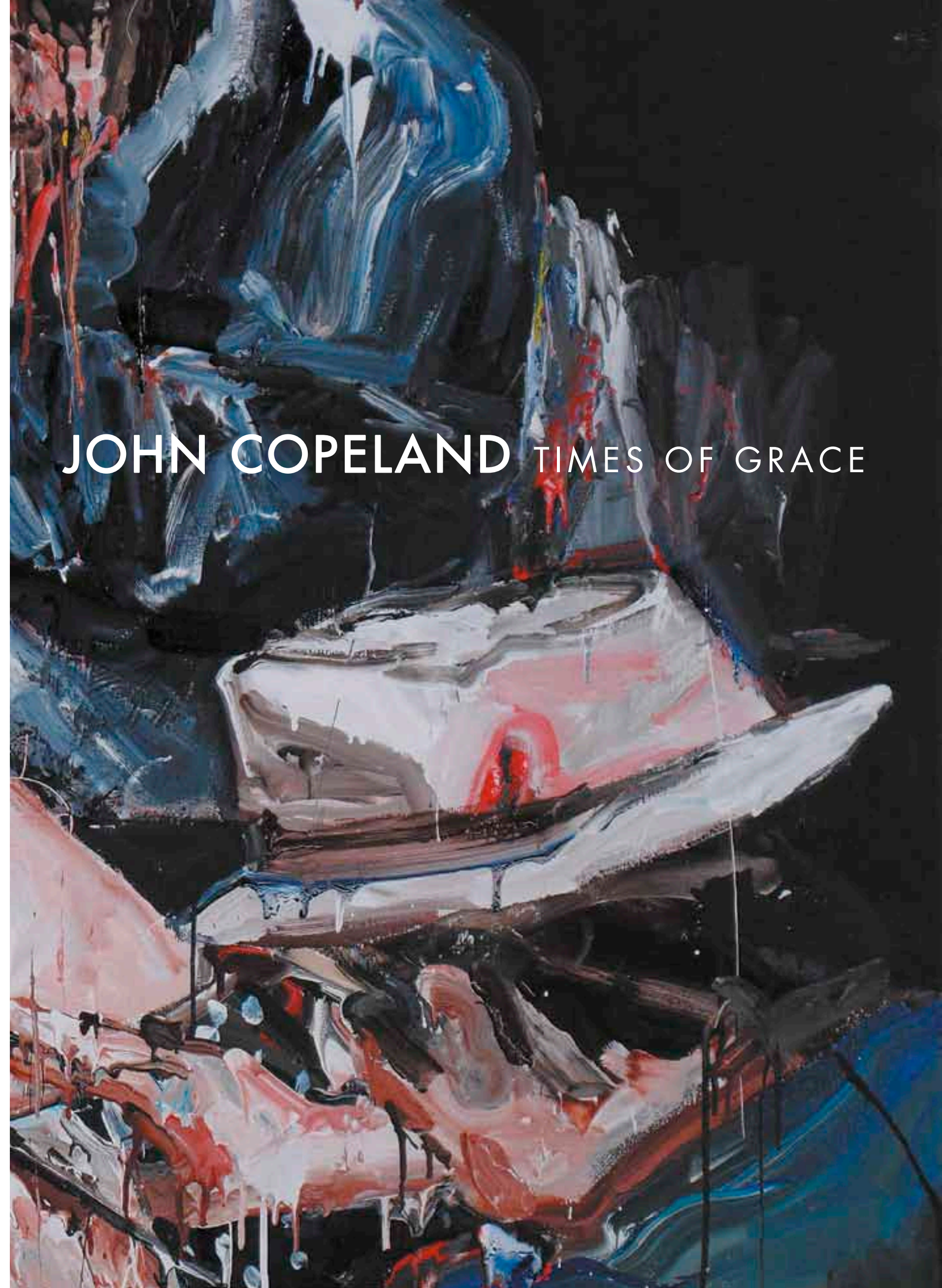
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JOHN COPELAND TIMES OF GRACE

REFLEX EDITIONS AMSTERDAM



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John Copeland was born 1976 in California. He studied at The California College of the Arts in Oakland and has lived and worked in New York City since 1998. His work has been shown at Nicholas Robinson Gallery in New York, V1 Gallery in Copenhagen and Alex Daniels / Reflex Gallery in Amsterdam.

Nanna Thylstrup (b. 1981, Copenhagen, Denmark). Writer, curator and currently doing a PHD about cultural policy. Earlier books: "Law and Disorder - Ulrik Crone" (contributing ed.) and "There is a U in Us - four years of V1 Gallery". Select earlier shows: "Paper Trails - new adventures in drawing" (2007), V1 Gallery, and "Eyesore" (2008), V1 Gallery.

JOHN COPELAND
TIMES OF GRACE



‘IT’S SHOWTIME’

Through the forlorn years time will recede into your own soul, divided only by your imagination, and the will to extend your conscious life.

In any event heaven is a nice place, but it is here I exist to express the glory of it all for your viewing pleasure. Sex it up for the good times; the bourgeois often mix it up with the commoner for the good times. Oh yes my good man can you see the depth of the imagery, it is outstanding and full of good foresight. Reflect on your desire, on the fact that we are all pigs, and a good roll in the mud won’t get you to hell. God is not all that concerned about whom, in whom, or where you stick it on the good of God’s green earth. Day to day drudgery is capped off with a few days of after-hours. Invoking the good debate with a few rounds of intellectual

intercourse prior to the when the real fucking begins, ha, ha, hoist the flag. The ship has left the dock, and your still standing there with your dick in your hand. Get with it man, use it or loose it. See that pile of chicks over there, they would be happy to give you a hand. Chicks need love too; everyone needs love, God and Satan alike, two sides of the coin. It is in these times of grace that a potential neurosis could come in with the tide. How to kill god, is what you seem to be asking, wisdom purity truth, revenge is the answer, have a dialogue with god, what did I do something wrong? Explore the frontier of time, and the fact that the only time is now. Suits and Jackets; Cuts and Jeans, we all grovel in the end.

A. J. HEROLD

'I CARE BECAUSE YOU DO'

Introduction by Nanna Thylstrup

John Copeland's works depict the discreet charm of the bourgeoisie and the thoughts and desires that reign behind its facade. By removing the thin layer of supposed perfection applied to life, by us or by others, Copeland explores and mirrors human relations and interactions. His dark humor and sincere fascination with the many strange facets of human existence resurface time and again in an arena filled with lust and hope, malice, love, power, joy, orgies, drunks, bikers, bigots, laughing girls and faceless men. Many of the people filling the stage in Copeland's works are also the people that are closest to him when the lights go out. Respect for his friends emanate from the canvas, while he upholds a distinct distance to everyone else. The audience in the works keeps up a civilized appearance, while secretly taking pleasure in - or longing for - the pain and carnal knowledge underneath. But they are never invited in.

As an extension of his previous work, John Copeland creates an interconnected tangle of

people looking at images, people looking at people and images looking at images. A voyeuristic gaze connects the details without discriminating; Copeland's eyes rest just as easily on beer, tits and trash as they do on restless relationships and power politics. And his observations hold the viewer in a state of quivering excitement kept in check by an uneasy feeling of being just that: a Peeping Tom.

Yet, Copeland's undiscerning stare also reminds the viewer that his works are just as much about craft as they are about content. His artistic eruptions materialize as textural substance with thematic concerns flowing directly into the paintings. His treatment of the action in the arena is felt, physically and structurally, as a distortion telling ugly truths with a warm grin. Copeland's repeated applications of layers keep the works on the edge, while his intuitive restraint keeps the images from falling apart. Drips are proofs of choices revealing Copeland's style, telling the viewer why a mark is here and not there, the way that colours are put together and why there is





texture here and flat surface there. Precise details are worked into abstractions only to return to detail again. Faces may melt, but the dripping leaks draw out emotions usually kept at bay by controlled barriers, just as they question the viewer's knowledge of what is actually going on.

The phrase "I care because you do" literally painted on a partly denuded girl conveys a world difficult to decode. The words simultaneously open up to an affectionate space and a nihilistic rhetoric. John Copeland is indisputably virtuosic in his acrobatic manipulation of language, its sound and meaning. A magical twist of letters adds yet another energy to the images while introducing yet another relation to the viewer. The words creeping into the works are also a continuation of Copeland's fascination with idioms, sentences and statements that dominated his early work, then disappeared, only to reemerge on the naked female bodies inhabiting his canvases. Raymond Pettibon asserted that his work rested in language with drawing providing a location for it. Copeland's bodies of image and letters become one in the lawless and yet disciplined frontiers that are also his home. He assembles alphabetical signs into physical paintings, while retaining their vernacular character.

As opposed to his paintings, John Copeland's delicate drawings speak a different language, like fragile creeks leading off and into the raging

floods of the acrylics, tracing subtle whispers in the brash roars.

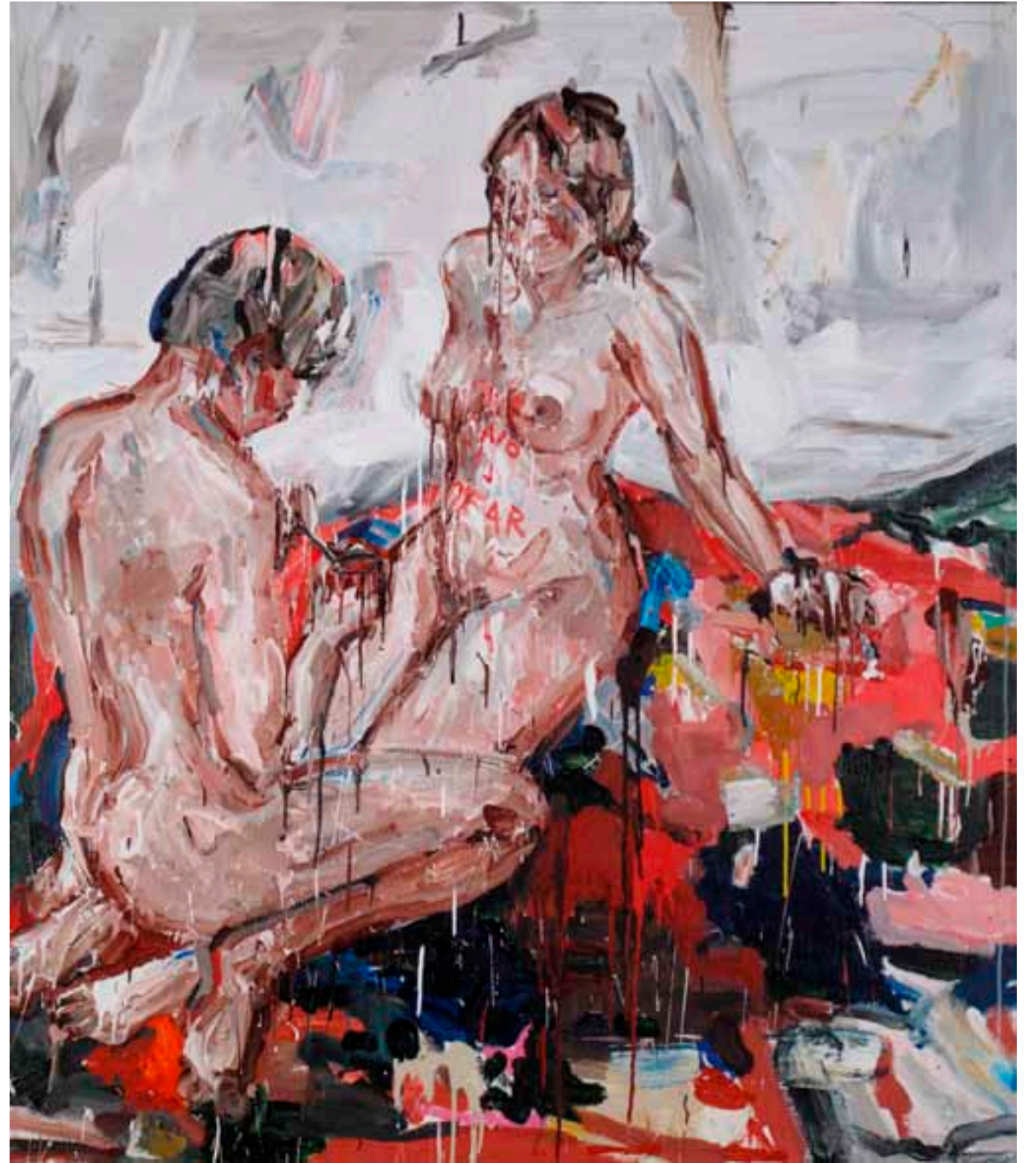
"Whether all grow black, or all grow bright, or all remain grey, it is grey we need to begin with, because of what it is, and what it can do, made of bright and black, able to shed the former, or the latter, and be the latter or the former alone. But perhaps I am the prey, on the subject of grey, in the grey, to delusions."

Samuel Beckett

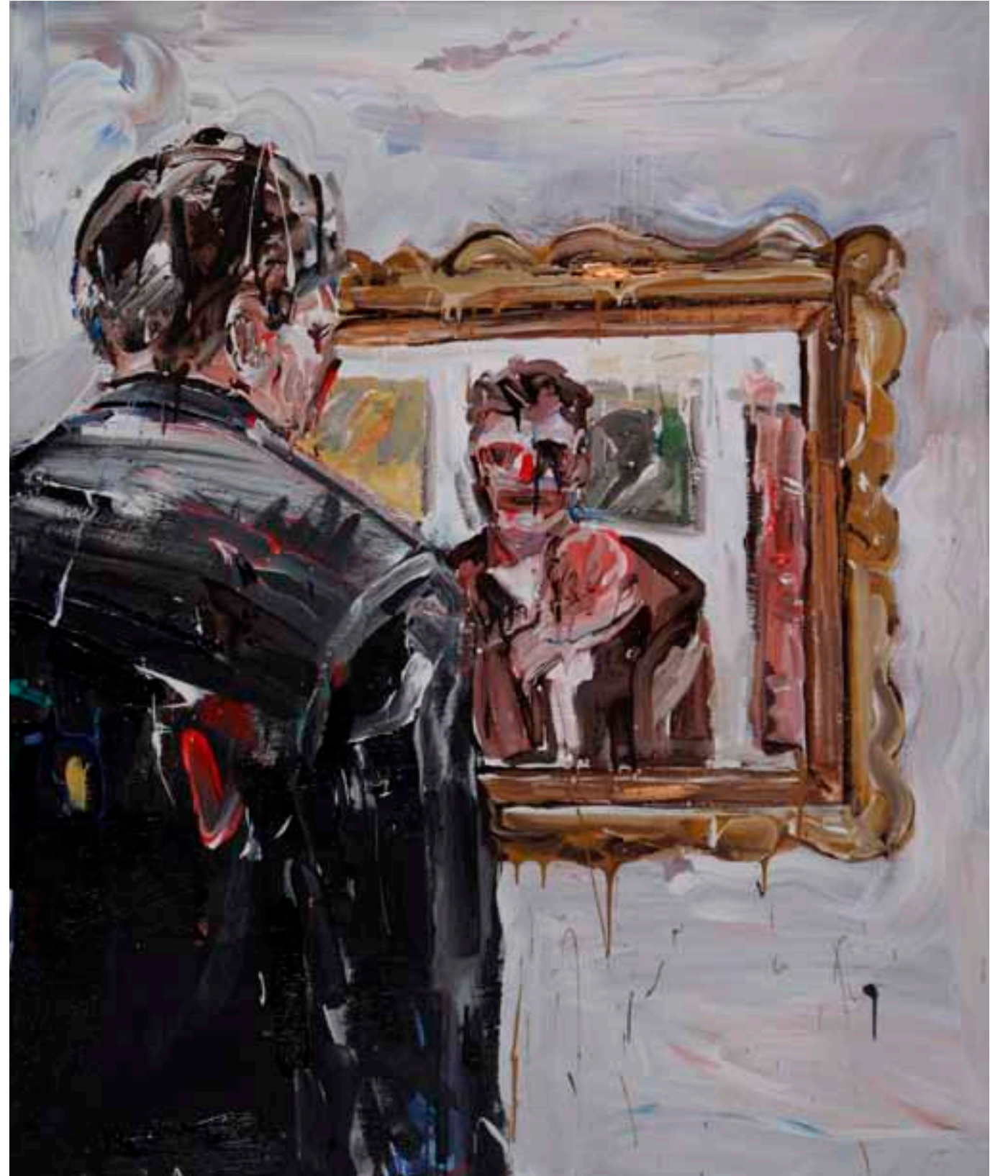
Mortal lines of lead delineate hidden passages under the spot lit stages. Here confusion and curious emotions stain blank pages with tender imperfections without giving into horror vacui. And even in these quiet moments, the farce never disappears. Something is always off, something is always funny and always in a horrible way. Balloons float in the darkness, like red Zeppelins offsetting the monotone grey skies, giving way to life-affirming discrepancies.

But instead of concluding that all is misery, the people in John Copeland's artistic arena seem almost celebratory. Chaos reigns, but as a vital rather than destructive force. Instead of emanating pessimism, Copeland's works take you on an absurd ride through a motley landscape towards the laughing gallows waiting at the end. To fight for truth, the lack thereof, and hypocrisy in all its deformities. The grit is glory, glory is a joke and the joke's on you, if you believe anything else.

























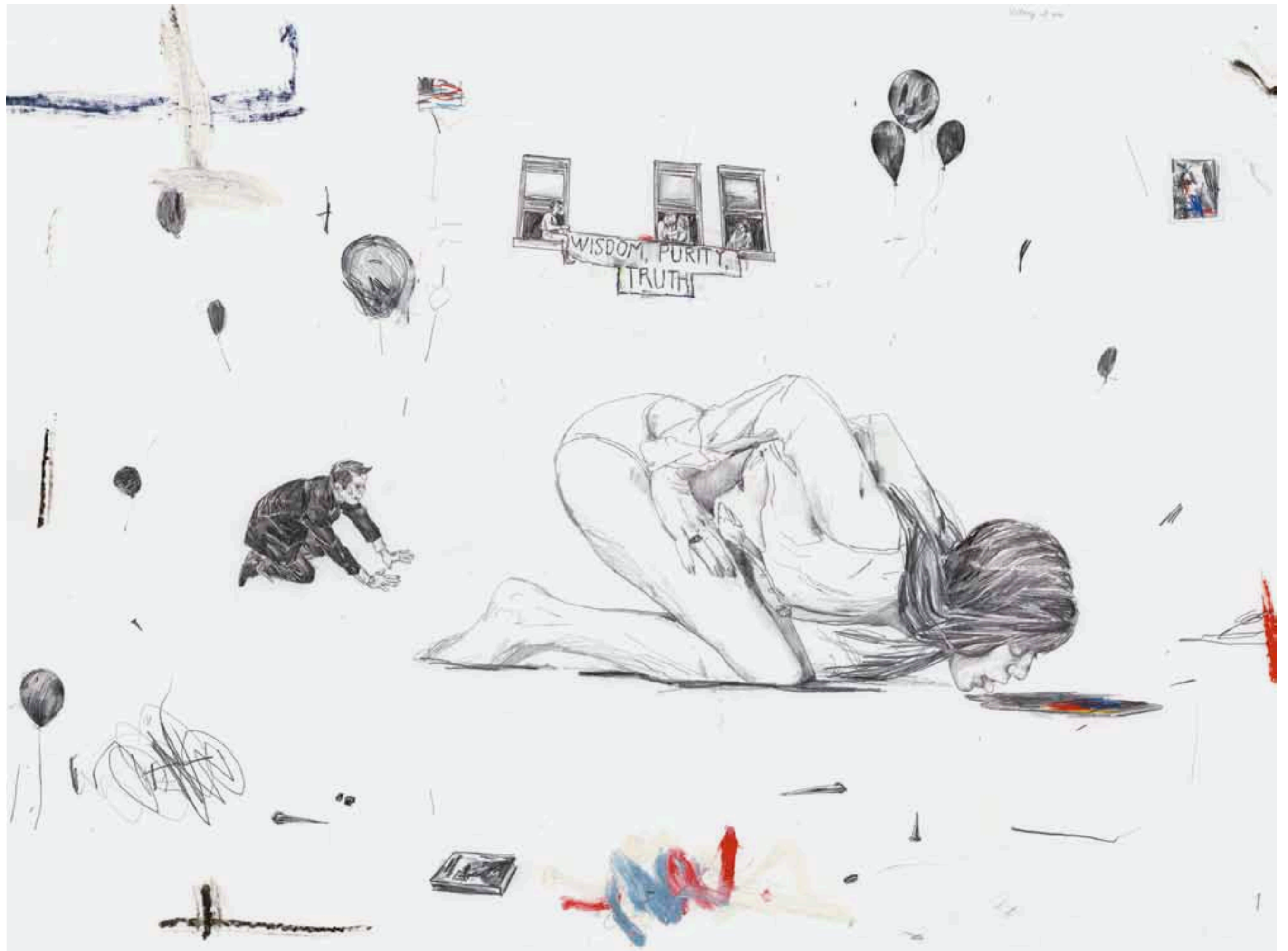


























COLOPHON

JOHN COPELAND

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All artworks by John Copeland ©

Introduction by A. J. Herold and Nanna Thylstrup

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Old Glory, 90 x 70 inches, acrylic on canvas, 2008